

THE PROBLEM OF PLAGIARISM: A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS OF THEOLOGY

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A prominent Indian physicist is accused of plagiarizing the research of a Stanford University professor.³⁴² The dean of an American law school is dismissed over charges of plagiarism.³⁴³ An influential education minister in South Korea resigns after a citizens' group discovers the official had plagiarized.³⁴⁴ A Boston College theology professor plagiarizes parts of his book on ethics.³⁴⁵ Cases like these demonstrate both that plagiarism is a growing problem and that it is a worldwide problem that affects all disciplines. Other high-profile cases may be cited.

THE CRISIS OF PLAGIARISM

"Internet plagiarism is becoming more dangerous than we realize," writes an English instructor at an American college.³⁴⁶ In the age of the Internet with breathtaking advancements in the electronic storage, search and dissemination of information, plagiarism is rapidly becoming a crisis. As an unparalleled means to plagiarism, the Internet is stifling rather than aiding education. The jaw-dropping amount of information available on the Internet is often the greatest temptation for students working late at night on a paper due the next morning. What is more, "online paper mills" offer a variety of papers for purchase, all major credit cards accepted. Shopping for papers is as easy as buying an MP3 player or a software download. Some commercial sites will even hire researchers and writers to produce customized papers from

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³⁴²D. Cohen and M. A. Overland, "International Notes," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 9 (2002): 44.

³⁴³A. M. Cox and R. Monastersky, "Trinity International Dismisses Law Dean Over Plagiarism Charges," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 48, no. 2 (2001): 17.

³⁴⁴D. Cohen, "International Notes," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 47, no. 5 (2000): 55.

³⁴⁵T. Bartlett, "Theology Professor is Accused of Plagiarism in His Book on Ethics," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51, no. 20 (2005): 10.

³⁴⁶E. Laird, "Internet Plagiarism: We All Pay the Price," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 47, no. 44 (2001): 5.

scratch.³⁴⁷ The latest motto is “If you professor can have a research assistant, why can’t you?”³⁴⁸

In theological education, the problem is no better. A quick visit to TheologyPapers.Com, an online paper mill specifically for theology students, will likely astonish any theological educator.³⁴⁹ On the front page, the desperate student is met with “Thou shalt not flunk thy term paper...,” a sarcastic if not sinister play on student fears.³⁵⁰ Their selling point—“Use our reports as examples to help you write your own!”—is no consolation.³⁵¹ These sites are part of the problem, not a part of the solution, because they encourage plagiarism and make a profit doing so.

This guide seeks to be a part of the solution to the problem of plagiarism. Of particular interest is the problem of plagiarism in theological education of non-western settings. To be sure, plagiarism is not limited to non-western settings. However, students from these settings may have two powerful forces working against them. First, some non-western cultures may not consider plagiarism a serious offense.³⁵² Of course, even in Western cultures where the educational community considers the offense serious, students still plagiarize. But one can easily imagine that when a society as a whole looks the other way, plagiarism is that much easier.³⁵³ Second, in many non-western settings, good research practice, which helps avoid plagiarism, is not

³⁴⁷R. Phillips, “Plagiarism and Theological Education,” *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 5, no. 2 (2002): 8-9.

³⁴⁸<http://www.lazystudents.com> (10 October 2005).

³⁴⁹As referred to in R. Phillips, “Plagiarism and Theological Education,” *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 5, no. 2 (2002): 7.

³⁵⁰<http://www.theologypapers.com> (15 October 2005). There are likely hundreds of similar online paper mills: CheatHouse.Com, DueNow.Com, TermPaperRelief.Com, etc.

³⁵¹Their disclaimer is similar: “Our work is designed only to assist students in the preparation of their own work. Students who use our service are responsible not only for writing their own papers, but also for citing The Paper Store [parent company of TheologyPapers.Com] as a source when doing so.”

³⁵²E.g., J. Xueqin, “Chinese Academics Consider a ‘Culture of Copying,’” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 48, no. 35 (2002): 45, suggests, “For many years now in China, plagiarism among professors and cheating among students have been acceptable practices in a society that has shown little awareness of intellectual property-rights...”

³⁵³N. Vyhmeister, *Your Indispensable Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 45, writes, “In some cultures, to repeat the words of the masters only shows how much one respects their wisdom. Borrowing from their writings is the only way to write.”

readily taught in the educational system. Thus, students are simply left uninformed about how to cite sources, use quotations, and appropriate ideas while acknowledging their owners. Students from these settings need help in understanding what good research and plagiarism are.

DEFINING PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is foremost a moral problem. The *Webster's Dictionary*³⁵⁴ defines the verb *plagiarize* as “to take (ideas, writings, etc.) from (another) and pass them off as one’s own.” A fuller definition is offered by a standard work on research method: “You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else’s words or ideas but fail to credit that person, leading your readers to think that those words are yours.”³⁵⁵ On the one hand, plagiarism is taking the words, phrases, sentences, ideas, theories, opinions, or even whole works of another writer, and pretending they are one’s own original work. On the other hand, plagiarism is a “failure to give credit”³⁵⁶ and a lack of acknowledgement to one’s sources.

Acts of plagiarism may vary from the most blatant (e.g., intentional copying of a whole paper and pretending that one has originally produced it.) to the unintentional (e.g., forgetting to place quotations marks around a quote) or even unconscious (e.g., unconsciously repeating a memorable line from one’s reading). Deliberate plagiarism is a matter of dishonesty while unintentional plagiarism is usually a matter of laziness or carelessness. While in theory one may differentiate between intentional and unintentional plagiarism, students must realize that the readers of their work, namely their instructors, cannot readily determine their intentions, but only that a student has copied another’s work without proper reference. Thus, even if a writer has made an honest mistake, it appears equally grievous to the reader.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴*Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 3d ed., s.v. “plagiarize.”

³⁵⁵W. Booth, G. Colomb and J. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 201-202.

³⁵⁶K. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 74.

³⁵⁷So, Booth, Colomb and Williams, cited above, include “intentionally or not.” Take for example Noel Perrin’s case when this Dartmouth English professor was accused of plagiarism because of his own and his editor’s carelessness. He concludes,

REASONS FOR PLAGIARISM

The reasons for the general rise of plagiarism may be attributed either to the great ease with which information may be gathered through the Internet or to the growing indifference a society or culture might show toward plagiarism. But individual student writers choose to plagiarize for a number of common reasons. Students may find it helpful to consider why they are tempted to plagiarize so that they take measures to avoid the situations that lead to plagiarism. Likewise, a consideration of the reasons for plagiarism might aid educators in helping prevent plagiarism, identifying causes and getting at the root of the problem. Yet, these reasons or causes are not excuses and students must never invoke them as such.

There are at least five common reasons for plagiarism:

(1) Students plagiarize out of *expediency*. In a fast-food culture, nothing is more convenient than ready-made papers to go. The lazy student simply finds a paper on the Internet, changes a couple of words, adds his name, and prints it out. Can anything be easier? This is the worst form of plagiarism that undermines the very goal of learning. Virtually no effort goes into this sort of plagiarism and students who plagiarize because it is expedient do not fear being caught.

(2) Students plagiarize out of *greed*. The desire for good grades and academic honors usually motivate students to perform well. But such motivation can easily turn into obsession. Academic integrity goes out the window when students are obsessed about producing an “A” paper.

(3) Students plagiarize out of *fear*. This reason is the flip side of greed. The fear of low grades, rather than the greed for high marks, drives this sort of plagiarism. The lack of confidence leads some writers to give up trying altogether and resort to plagiarism. The fear of incompetence coupled with a false confidence that plagiarism will not be caught is a dangerous combination. In non-western settings, especially, this sort of fear is regularly a root cause of plagiarism.

(4) Students plagiarize out of *desperation*. Competent students are often poor time managers and find themselves in a bind. Moreover, students today have too many demands on their time and do not prioritize their activities. They rationalize that they are busy doing other

“The moral for me is that carelessness is almost as great a sin in writers as deceit.” N. Perrin, “How I Became a Plagiarist,” *American Scholar* 61, no. 2 (1992): 259.

worthwhile things (e.g., for theology students, God's work in the ministry!), and have no time to finish a research term paper. The assignment is due the next morning and they are looking for a miracle. Out of desperation, they turn to the Internet and plagiarism is inescapable. Students who find themselves in such desperate situations are guilty not only of giving into the temptation of plagiarism but also of putting themselves in a vulnerable situation.

(5) Students plagiarize out of *ignorance*. Rarely, a writer will commit plagiarism unwittingly through unconscious copying. He writes a line that is in his mind, but does not realize that it comes from a source he has read. Moreover, writing teachers routinely tell their students to imitate the best writers. The necessary risk to such an approach, though slight, is that the imitation might be too close. Although this occurs rarely, students should guard against source ignorance (i.e., not knowing the source of one's writing) by taking good notes and by making sure that they know where their thoughts came from.

Some students plagiarize out of moral ignorance. Whether or not this is due to individual or societal laxity, some students simply do not know that copying other people's work without due credit is wrong. Ignorance is never an acceptable excuse for plagiarism, especially in undergraduate and graduate education.

Still others plagiarize out of research ignorance. They want to avoid plagiarism but are not competent enough a researcher to cite their sources properly. These writers are simply unfamiliar with good research practice. A novice researcher may not understand, for example, that appropriating another's ideas, not just copying words, without due credit is plagiarism. Research ignorance is often the cause of first-time offences, especially from education cultures that do not consider plagiarism seriously. Research ignorance is quickly overcome when student writers take the time to learn about accepted research methods.

Having reviewed the individual reasons for plagiarism, students must understand that readers will care little about their research competence or whether the offence was the first. At the undergraduate level, instructors may deal charitably about the level of research competence expected in their students. At the postgraduate level, research competence is assumed and demanded. If it looks like plagiarism, it is simply judged as that, whether or not it was out of ignorance or expedience or some other reason. From the perspective of

the reader, who cannot judge the writer's intention, the individual reasons for plagiarism really do not matter.

PLAGIARISM AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Those who flagrantly plagiarize must be reminded of the ethics of plagiarism. Plagiarism is unethical for at least two reasons. First, plagiarism is dishonest. Second, because plagiarism involves taking of another's (intellectual) property without permission or proper acknowledgment, it amounts to stealing. Christian theology students must consider the ethics of plagiarism more seriously in the light of their faith and beliefs.

At the heart of the problem of plagiarism is dishonesty in the human heart. Plagiarism is dishonest because the writer pretends that the information he presents is his own thought or creation. Reasons (1), (2), (3) and (4) above all involve deception. Deception is decidedly unchristian and contrary to the very character of God. The Old Testament Laws strictly forbid deception. For example, the Law reads, "You shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another" (Lev 19:11, ESV; //Exod 20:16). The Old Testament also teaches that deception is not without consequences, that only condemnation awaits those who lie. Proverbs 19:5 reads, "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape" (ESV; also Prov 19:9; 21:28).

In the New Testament, the message is equally clear. The redeemed Christian should not deceive. For the Apostle Paul, dishonesty is inconsistent with the "new self" created to be like God. He writes in his letter to the Colossians, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self" (Col 3:9-10; ESV). For the Apostle John, the children of God are characterized by truthfulness while those who belong to the devil, the "father of lies" (John 8:44), are characterized by deceitfulness.

Plagiarism is stealing because it is taking another's property without permission. While research inevitably entails the proper borrowing of words and ideas in order to develop one's own, any borrowing without acknowledgement amounts to theft. When an author publishes a work, he is giving permission to make use of his words and ideas, but only when proper credit is given him. No author would

consent to borrowing without due credit.³⁵⁸ All five reasons, (1) to (5), discussed above involve theft and intentionality matters little.

Stealing, too, is strongly prohibited by both Testaments. “You shall not steal,” reads Exodus 20:15 (also Lev 19:11; Deut 5:19). Respect for the property of one’s neighbors is demanded of God’s people. In the New Testament, the redeemed believer must put off the old self with its “former way of life” (Eph 4:22; NIV) and stop stealing—“He who has been stealing must steal no longer” (Eph 4:28; NIV). Stealing does not fit the status, the lifestyle or the message of the Christian student. It is decidedly hypocritical. Paul’s challenge to hypocritical Christians in Romans 2:21 is especially appropriate for theology students training for the ministry: “While you preach against stealing, do you steal?” Literally hundreds of other passages of Scripture could be added in support of the ethical mandates against deceit and theft. Avoiding plagiarism is a matter of obedience in faith as well as a matter of personal Christian integrity.

Even still, the theology student who is tempted to plagiarize should consider the consequences. Preachers have been dismissed from churches for plagiarizing sermons. The reputations of well-known heroes and scholars have been tarnished forever because of plagiarism. Degrees have been revoked years later when plagiarism was discovered in master’s theses or doctoral dissertations. Students have been dismissed from university because of plagiarism. All of this goes on permanent record because a written document (and its electronic counterpart!), even obscure unpublished ones, has a permanence about it. One never knows when someone will discover it and bring it to light. Plagiarism then is worth neither sacrificing personal integrity nor the embarrassment of discovery weeks, months, or even years later.

TYPES OF PLAGIARISM

Because some academic cultures may not teach about plagiarism, a few students genuinely do not understand the ins and outs of plagiarism. Therefore, these students may plagiarize without an awareness of what plagiarism is. In theory, this is unintentional plagiarism and the rest of this guide seeks to help these students understand and avoid plagiarism.

³⁵⁸A good analogy is the proper borrowing of a library book, which entails checking it out at the circulation desk. The check-out process acknowledges that the book does not belong to the borrower, but rather to the library. Should a borrower simply walk out with the book, he is no longer borrowing but rather stealing.

With this objective in mind, plagiarism is described under four headings: quotation, paraphrase, idea, and translation.

Quotation Plagiarism

Plagiarism in the form of direct quotation is the most obvious type, and therefore, most easily detected (and avoided). When a text is copied word for word without either a reference or quotation marks, it is plagiarism. Citing verbatim the work of another requires not only that one give credit to the source, but also that one enclose those words (phrases or sentences) in quotation marks, or present them in block quotation form, if more than a few lines (i.e. a paragraph length quotation).

As an example, the following quotation from Daniel Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding* is used:

Underlying each of these understandings of the task of theology is the assumption that faith and inquiry are inseparable. Theology arises from the freedom and responsibility of the Christian community to inquire about its faith in God. . . . Defining the theological task in this way emphasizes that theology is not mere repetition of traditional doctrines but a persistent search for the truth to which they point and which they only partially and brokenly express.³⁵⁹

Several things should be noted. First, the above quotation is too long to be introduced in the text. Second, a block quotation is indented, separated and in this case, in smaller font, to distinguish it from the body text. Third, because the indentation is another way of saying it is a direct quotation, there are no quotation marks. Fourth, a sentence from the original was not duplicated, and designated by three consecutive periods, indicating intervening words. Fifth, a footnote reference is added at the end of the block quote with the citation information in the corresponding footnote below.

Should the first sentence of the above quotation be found in the body text, it must be enclosed in double quotation marks and have a footnote reference: "Underlying each of these understandings of the task of theology is the assumption that faith *and* inquiry are inseparable."³⁶⁰ Note that Migliore's very words are enclosed in quotation marks. It is plagiarism if one were to include neither the

³⁵⁹D. L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1. [for illustration purposes only]

³⁶⁰Ibid. Emphasis added.

quotation marks nor the footnote reference after the closing quotation marks. Note also that an alteration was made when “and” was emphasized by italic font. Added emphasis, comment or clarification should be noted in the footnote because good research demands precision.

At this point, the above quotation improperly written would look like the following:

Underlying each of these understandings of the task of theology is the assumption that faith and inquiry are inseparable. Theology arises from the freedom and responsibility of the Christian community to inquire about its faith in God. . . . Defining the theological task in this way emphasizes that theology is not mere repetition of traditional doctrines but a persistent search for the truth to which they point and which they only partially and brokenly express.

Should the above paragraph appear as is in a paper, there is no way of knowing that it is in fact a quotation and the writer has done nothing to suggest it is different from the rest of the paragraphs and sentences, which are his production. Even with a footnote reference, this is plagiarism. It is entirely improper for any part of Migliore’s words to end up outside quotation marks. For example:

Migliore states, “Theology arises from the freedom and responsibility of the Christian community to inquire about its faith in God.”³⁶¹ Defining the theological task in this way emphasizes that theology is not mere repetition of traditional doctrines.

There is a temptation to slip in the second sentence because of the intervening words in the original and because the writer has already given credit for the first bit. While such incorrect citations may often result from carelessness, it is nevertheless plagiarism.

Paraphrase Plagiarism

While most students can without difficulty avoid quotation-type plagiarism, plagiarism by paraphrase is trickier and probably more common. There is a variety of paraphrase-type plagiarism since a paraphrase may vary in its resemblance to the original. Thus, on the

³⁶¹Ibid.

one hand, it is nearly a direct quotation, with one or two changed words. On the other hand, a more subtle form of paraphrase plagiarism occurs when a little more effort has gone into changing the original words and sentences, and the outcome more closely resembles a good summary.

The following example uses a paragraph from D. A. Carson's commentary on the Gospel of John:

The primary objections to a double cleansing of the temple are two. First, there is a deep-seated scholarly bias against doubles of anything in Scripture, primarily because of the desire to tease out trajectories of developments. . . . Second, it is often argued that if Jesus had cleansed the temple once the authorities would never have let him get away with it again.³⁶²

In paraphrase plagiarism, the Carson text above might be only slightly modified and presented as one's own paragraph, as in the following.

The primary objections to a double cleansing of the temple are twofold. First, there is an *ingrained* scholarly bias against doubles of anything in Scripture, *chiefly* because of the desire to *disentangle* trajectories of developments. Second, it is often *contended* that if Jesus had cleansed the temple once the *leaders* would never have let him get away with it again.

Notice that certain words have been replaced by synonyms, something readily accomplished by using a thesaurus. This type of paraphrase is a rather blatant form of plagiarism. Even with a correct footnote reference to Carson's commentary, the writer is guilty of plagiarism.

A subtler form of paraphrase plagiarism occurs when a little more effort has gone into changing the original. This type of plagiarized paraphrase may look like the following.

There are two main objections to a double cleansing of the temple. First, scholars have an ingrained bias against doubles of anything in the Bible. Second, many argue that the authorities would never have let Jesus get away with another temple cleansing.

While the above resembles a proper summary, a closer examination of the paraphrase reveals that each sentence of the original is more or less

³⁶²D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 177-178. [for illustration purposes only]

copied directly, changing the order of words here and there, leaving out small bits, and slightly varying the vocabulary. What makes this plagiarism is that the writer has the original in front of him as he writes, and depends on the original for syntax, structure and wording. While this type of plagiarism is less obvious and more difficult to detect, it is nevertheless as plagiaristic as the more blatant forms and is perhaps more deceptive. Even with a footnote reference, the above example would be considered plagiarism by most in the academic community. This type of paraphrase plagiarism is guarded against by writing only after fully understanding the source (which means one is then able to express the thought in one's own words), and by writing without the original source in one's view. It is in many cases far better to quote the source directly (even in short phrases), giving full acknowledgement, than to risk the charge of plagiarism by reproducing a superficial paraphrase.

Idea Plagiarism

The final type of plagiarism occurs when a writer passes off ideas, thoughts or theories from a source as if they were his own. This type of plagiarism, too, has a range, from the deliberate "borrowing" of ideas from obscure sources (readily available on the Internet!) to the omission of credit to the pioneers of a particular idea because the student does not know about them. The latter would probably be excused as "bad research" at the undergraduate level. It would not be excused at the postgraduate level. Furthermore, a reference to the original pioneers of a particular idea is unnecessary if it is considered "common knowledge" in a particular research field. Failure to cite the original source of such ideas would not be considered plagiarism. Generally, however, the arguments and finer points of a research paper do not rest on common knowledge.

As an example of idea-type plagiarism, if a student researches the question of how Christianity relates to culture and concludes that Christ must be the transformer of culture, all this may be well and good. However, his idea that Christ must be the transformer of culture is neither new nor original. This research topic was classically treated by

H. Richard Niebuhr, a twentieth-century American theologian, is his book, *Christ and Culture*.³⁶³

In this book, Niebuhr threats five ideas: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox and Christ as transformer of culture. To use any of these wordings and the ideas behind them without acknowledgement of Niebuhr's classic work will doubtless be considered plagiarism. Even if somehow that student came upon these ideas on his own (which is unlikely), he is still obligated to cite Niebuhr and others because they thought of those ideas earlier and were pioneers of these ideas. The student should not avoid referring to Niebuhr simply because he had come to a similar idea on his own. The reader cannot help but think that the student has plagiarized the idea even though he had not. Rather than risk the charge of plagiarism, it is better to simply note (in a footnote) that Niebuhr and others had drawn the same conclusion in their works, and that the writer had observed it later.

To guard against idea plagiarism, the writer should be careful to record the sources of any statements, thoughts, arguments, interpretations, etc., which have found their way into his paper. Normally, when a student is meticulous about acknowledging the sources of quotations and summaries, idea plagiarism is rarely a problem because the ideas are contained in the quotations and summaries themselves. Nevertheless, as one writes, one should constantly be aware of the source of the ideas being written.

Translation Plagiarism

In non-western settings, plagiarism is complicated further when translation is involved. For example, most students do not consider a translation of foreign words to be a direct quotation. Thus, they may justify leaving out the quotation marks. However, it is good practice to enclose translated texts in quotation marks if the translation relates the full and accurate meaning of the words and sentences in question. Translations, which are more paraphrased, may also involve plagiarism when the understanding of the original is superficial and little effort is made to express the material in one's own words, even if they are words in another language.

³⁶³H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951). [for illustration purposes only]

Reverse translations of translated texts, which were originally in English, should be so noted, and never passed off as one's quotation or summary of the original English text. The safest thing to do when citing a translated text is to use quotation marks and translate the text as accurately as possible, being sure to note that the quotation is a personal translation and that the original English version was not available. If the original English version is available, citations from it are preferable to reverse-translated citations from a foreign-language translation.

Practical Measures

There are some practical measures to take in order to avoid plagiarism:

(1) Get in the habit of doing *diligent research*. Laziness and procrastination are leading causes of plagiarism among students. When one needs to cut corners because of time pressures, plagiary becomes an easy way out. When a student avoids such pressures, chances are that he or she will not be tempted to plagiarize. Plan your papers and start researching and writing immediately upon receiving the assignment. Plagiarism occurs most frequently when a paper is due the next morning.

(2) Get in the habit of using a *standard research style*. Students who do not know how to cite a source properly will be tempted to plagiarize by either not citing the source at all or making up a false citation. An essential part of education and writing is knowing how to cite various types of sources such as books, articles and essays. To that end, a good style manual, such as Turabian,³⁶⁴ *APA*³⁶⁵ or others,³⁶⁶ is essential and most theological institutions will have a prescribed standard.

³⁶⁴ K. L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³⁶⁵ American Psychological Association, *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5th ed. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2001).

³⁶⁶ Other style manuals vary in size, detail and discipline. For example, the main standard for the arts and humanities in the USA is University of Chicago Press Staff, *The Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers*, 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and for biblical studies, an emerging standard is Society of Biblical Literature, *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody: Hendricksen, 1999).

(3) Get in the habit of often using *citation phrases* such as “according to,” “[so and so] suggests,” “as [so and so] says,” or something of that nature. Such phrases force a reference to one’s sources. For example, if a student writes, “According to Carson, there were two temple cleansings in the ministry of Jesus,” then he has already acknowledged the source of his information in the text of his sentence. Even if he were to forget to add a footnote reference, he would not be charged with plagiarism.

(4) Get in the habit of inserting *footnote references*. Often students unintentionally plagiarize because they write out an idea, summary or even a quotation from a source with the intention of adding a footnote later, but forget to do so. Furthermore, a paper that covers a large amount of material and yet refers to few sources raises a red flag in the mind of the reader. Thus, it is probably good practice for students to err on the side of too many footnote references than the other way around.

(5) Get in the habit of taking *meticulous notes*. Bad note taking is frequently responsible for inadvertent plagiarism. Students lay the groundwork for plagiarism when they are not careful about the citation information of their sources. Later, when a source is used but its citation information is wrong or missing, plagiarism is almost inevitable. Others may take notes by writing down good quotations, but forget they were quotations and use them word for word.

(6) Get in the habit of *rewriting and revising*. Any good writing goes through several rewritings and revisions. Others may help by reading through the work and commenting. During this process, keep an eye out for plagiarism. Make sure that citations are proper, that sources of idea and summaries are properly acknowledged, and that paraphrases are real paraphrases. A little effort in rewriting goes a long way in avoiding plagiarism.

RESOURCES FOR PLAGIARISM

Information and resources for educating students about plagiarism are lacking. Most texts on research methods and writing have a dutiful section on plagiarism, but they do not do justice to the issue. One of the more adequate is *The Craft of Research* by W. Booth, G. Colomb, and J. Williams.³⁶⁷ They offer a comprehensive definition of plagiarism as well as tips on avoiding different types of plagiarism.

³⁶⁷ 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Reputable universities manage a number of excellent websites that inform students about plagiarism and access is free of charge. These sites offer a fuller explanation of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it than most printed resources. Educators may use them as required reading and students may consult them for answers to their questions about plagiarism. The following is a sample of what is available online:

Georgetown University

<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/plagiarism.html>

Purdue University

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html

Indiana University

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

Penn State University

<http://tlt.psu.edu/suggestions/cyberplag/>

Plagiarism Detection

Plagiarism detection services, which are either Internet based or Internet connected, are developing rapidly and use the Internet to fight plagiarism. These sites and programs receive the electronic files of student papers and compare them to other files and pages available on the Internet. In much the same way an individual teacher might search the Internet for suspicious content, plagiarism detection programs and websites are tools to search out the sources of plagiarized content in a quick and systematic fashion. Below is a sampling of available services:

Canexus.Com – EVE version 2 (Essay Verification Engine) is a self-contained software program that runs a series of Internet searches and compares the paper with content found by those searches. The program runs on individual PCs (running Windows 95-XP) and is relatively inexpensive (\$29.99 USD for unlimited use). It has been featured on *The New York Times* and *Rolling Stone Magazine*. The instructor controls how deep a search should go in order to find plagiarized content.

Plagiarism.Com – Glatt Plagiarism Services, Inc., offers a system of teaching and detecting plagiarism. The site promotes a teaching program as well as a detection program with endorsements from

many newspapers and periodicals. The programs are a bit pricey at \$300 USD apiece. Detailed information about this service is sparse.

Turnitin.Com – This popular web-based service archives literally billions of documents from the Internet through a sophisticated sampling scheme and then compares the student paper against this massive archive for similarities in content, detecting not only word-for-word plagiarism but also more subtler forms. The service also archives millions of student papers previously uploaded to Turnitin.Com, including those of one’s own institution. In addition, the archive includes digitally available periodicals online. Students upload their papers directly into a designated webpage. The instructor receives an “originality report” for each paper submitted with a percentage that is deemed suspicious. The report is color-coded with the suspected sources just a mouse click away. The service combines plagiarism detection with course management tools such as grade books. Institutional or individual licenses are available and prices vary by class or institutional size.

MyDropBox.Com – Like its main competitor, Turnitin.Com, this service archives billions of documents, including online periodicals and student papers (from one’s own institution only), and offers course management tools. Their SafeAssignment program detects plagiarized content and produces a detailed report. Instructors are enabled to make informed decisions about whether or not a student has plagiarized. Institutional or individual licenses are available and prices vary.

Scriptum.Ca – This is primarily a course management service that includes plagiarism detection. Instructors can manage assignments and grades online while checking student papers for plagiarism. Institutional fees vary.

Statistically proven, these services lower the instances of plagiarism by making plagiarism easier to detect and prove, signaling to would-be plagiarizers that they will likely be found out. Plagiarism detection services are, unfortunately, a necessary deterrent for those who plagiarize without a second thought. For others, they are an encouragement to do better research and write more carefully.

CONCLUSION

Students and educators together can alleviate the crisis of plagiarism with some effort. Students must take plagiarism and academic integrity seriously. Educators must train students to avoid plagiarism and be vigilant about detecting and deterring it. Plagiarism must be controlled if the very foundation of theological education is to be preserved. The very heart of theological education is at risk. *Soli Deo gloria.*

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A Guide for Students. Avoiding Plagiarism: Published by: Institute of Quality & Knowledge Advancement (InQKA) Universiti Teknologi MARA Level 2, Block 11, INTEKMA Resort & Convention Centre, Persiaran Raja Muda, Section 7, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA Telefon: 603-5522 5540/5420/5551 Faks: 603-5522 5547 <http://inqka.uitm.edu.my/> Copyright 2012 Writers: Prof Madya Dr. Nor Azni Abdullah Prof Madya Dr. Ahmad Mazli Muhammad Prof Madya Dr. Krishnakumari. A simple definition of plagiarism is: Copying the words or ideas of someone else and using them in your work. With regards to plagiarism, the problem should be addressed at primary and secondary levels. Higher Education. Avoiding plagiarism and cheating. A guide for students at Swinburne University of Technology. (2nd edition). Marcia Devlin Higher Education Division. Avoiding plagiarism and cheating A guide for students at Swinburne University of Technology. How to use this guide. This guide on plagiarism has been especially written for you – new and returning Swinburne students. It contains advice, ideas and resources to assist you in avoiding plagiarism while studying at Swinburne. This provides a clear explanation of the main concepts of plagiarism and will help you recognise what plagiarism is. This section also contains frequently asked questions by students (with answers). The guide then provides specific advice on how to avoid plagiarism. How serious a problem is academic plagiarism? Numerous studies show that plagiarism and other types of academic fraud is increasing among undergraduate students. Therefore, plagiarism must be prevented at all levels of academic life from student papers to academic books. Nevertheless, care must be taken whenever one suspects a writer of plagiarism. It cannot be stressed enough that everyone makes a few mistakes and that genuine cases of similar use may occur. Consequently, what must be identified are patterns of behavior, repetitive practices, and clear indications of an attempt to deceive. The following paper attempts to identify plagiarism and show how plagiarists weave their web of deception. 2. So what is plagiarism? Defining plagiarism is actually